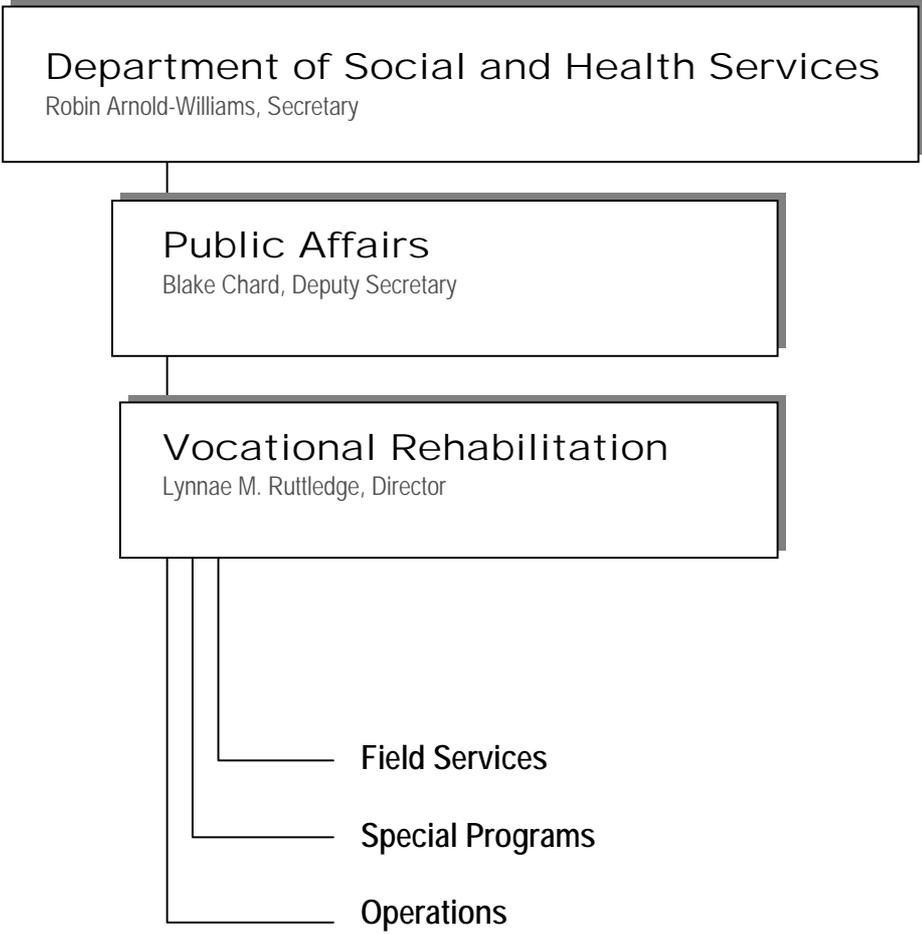




Strategic Plan 2007-2011
**Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation**



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Director
July 1, 2006



Purpose of This Document

This strategic plan communicates how we will advance our mission and goals in a changing environment and meet our future challenges, so that we can better serve the most vulnerable populations in Washington State. This document is a road map that guides the business policies and improvement strategies for our organization, employees and partners.

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Executive Summary

In 2006, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is growing in its ability to adapt to changes in leadership, changes in the population we serve, changes in the labor market, and changes in federal reporting and oversight.

A new DVR Director was appointed in October, 2005, to lead DVR through challenging times. For the past three years, the Division has experienced declining performance results, rising costs, a customer population with challenging barriers to employment and a federally mandated waiting list that has grown to more than 13,000.

To improve employment outcomes and help people with disabilities increase their earning power, DVR plans to expand the array of services offered and provided directly by DVR staff. DVR is also taking steps to strengthen its connection with the disability community in a more deliberate way to ensure the services designed reflect the needs and priorities of those we serve.

DVR counseling staff will receive training to increase their skills and expertise, especially in serving individuals with complex barriers to employment. Employees need to be challenged to meet and exceed expectations, and be recognized when they do. DVR will implement methods to assure case service quality and effectiveness and to identify statewide issues and trends that need to be addressed. In addition, the current case management system will be studied and options for improvement considered.

When it is necessary to purchase services by contract, counselors need vibrant, healthy partnerships with community providers who deliver quality services at a reasonable cost. A contract established with community rehabilitation programs in April 2004 has substantially increased the cost of services over the past three years. Consequently, average case costs are significantly higher, DVR is serving fewer individuals, and the waiting list is growing once again. DVR has negotiated new contracts starting July 1, 2006, that are more flexible, outcome-based, and set reasonable fees. Once established, DVR will implement a system for measuring contractor performance and effectiveness. The information will be used for contract decisions and will also be made available to counselors and eligible individuals for selecting contracted providers. DVR will improve its business partnership by improving communication and providing more timely information and feedback.

The issues and challenges facing individuals with disabilities cannot be overcome by DVR alone. There are opportunities to unite with partners in the adult service system to maximize resources and improve service delivery through more coordinated services. One specific area of focus will be partnering with the Mental Health Division to help them assume financial support for the Mental Health Clubhouses that provide community support for individuals with mental illness. Another focus will be with the school districts to address issues for students with disabilities transitioning to adult work life. DVR hopes to get increased funding to address this growing population of transition students. DVR also plans to coordinate better with partners in the statewide workforce development system to assist DVR customers, especially those on DVR's waiting list.

DVR plans to play a leadership role in revitalizing existing partnerships and pursuing new ones that will build capacity throughout the service system. DVR will rely on its key partners, the State Rehabilitation Council, State Independent Living Council, American

Indian VR programs and Client Assistance Program, to help shape DVR's policies, plans and priorities and to assure DVR maintains its focus on building a strong, vibrant program. Additionally, DVR recognizes the business community is critical to DVR's success and ability to help individuals with disabilities achieve their desired employment.

Chapter 1 • Our Guiding Directions

MISSION

The mission of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve a greater quality of life by obtaining and maintaining employment.

VISION

DVR envisions a world in which people with disabilities who want to work are employed.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

DVR believes in:

- The transformative power of employment on individual lives.
- Delivering high quality vocational rehabilitation services.
- Honoring and respecting each individual's strengths, skills, abilities and cultural identity.
- Building community partnerships that enhance employment opportunities for those we serve.

PRIORITIES OF GOVERNMENT

DVR's goals focus the services, supports, and partnerships needed to help individuals with disabilities achieve employment. This aligns with the priorities of government focus area, "improve the economic vitality of businesses and individuals."

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is designated to receive federal funds under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The Rehabilitation Act appears as Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, United States Code at 29 USC 701 et al. Seq.: Public Law 102-569. The code of federal regulations (CFR) outlining program authority and requirements is in Title 34 CFR, Section 361.

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 74.29 authorizes the receipt of funds and delivery of vocational rehabilitation programs and services in Washington State. The purposes stated in RCW 74.29 include:

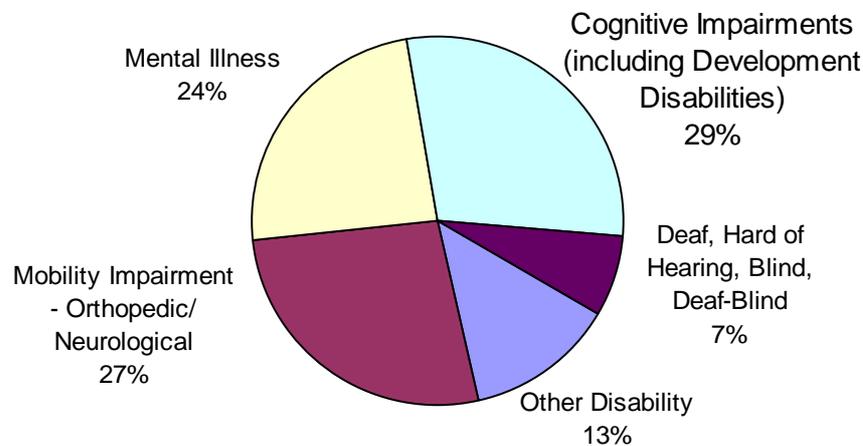
- (1) to rehabilitate individuals with disabilities who have a barrier to employment so that they may prepare for and engage in gainful occupation;
- (2) to provide persons with physical, mental, or sensory disabilities with a program of services which will result in greater opportunities for them to enter more fully into life in the community;
- (3) to promote activities which will assist individuals with disabilities to become self-sufficient and self-supporting; and
- (4) to encourage and develop community rehabilitation programs, job support services, and other resources needed by individuals with disabilities.

Chapter 2 • The People We Serve

INTRODUCTION

DVR serves eligible individuals with all types of disabilities who want to work and need vocational rehabilitation services to address and overcome barriers to employment that result from a disability. Individuals are eligible for services if they have a physical, mental, or sensory disability that results in an impediment to employment and they require vocational rehabilitation services to become employed.

Primary Disability of Customers



Over half (59%) of the individuals that DVR serves have more than one disability.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

DVR develops an individualized plan of services for each eligible individual to achieve employment consistent with his or her strengths, abilities, capabilities, concerns, priorities, resources, interests and informed choice. The vocational rehabilitation services provided are based on an individualized assessment of each person's vocational rehabilitation needs. One-on-one counseling and guidance is the primary service offered by DVR throughout the rehabilitation process. Additionally, DVR may provide other services including, but not limited to, the following:

Assistive technology services are available to evaluate the ways that technology can be used to reduce the impact of disability-related limitations and increase an individual's capacity to perform work-related tasks and activities.

Independent living services help individuals increase their ability to manage a variety of basic life activities before they can prepare for or work successfully. Independent

living services can include advocacy to locate safe, affordable housing, training to use public transportation, help setting up bank accounts and learning to manage one's own money, and other services.

Physical and mental restoration services help people deal with physical or mental health conditions that limit their ability to work. This can include physical or occupational therapy, vision and hearing evaluations, sensory aids and devices (hearing aids, glasses, etc.), mental health counseling or therapy and a number of other services.

Various **training services** are available for individuals who need to gain work skills, learn a new occupation or attain qualifying job credentials. The type of training one receives depends on his or her needs and goals. DVR supports individuals in on-the-job training, basic adult education, literacy, vocational and technical programs, and academic degree programs.

Self-employment services are provided to help individuals evaluate the feasibility of self-employment. Services include support to develop a business plan, look for financing, and manage the start-up process.

Job-related services include job placement, follow-up, and retention services. Services are used when an individual needs a customized job placement, needs help negotiating with an employer for job-related accommodations or other job-related interventions and supports. Services enable individuals to adjust to the job, communicate effectively with the employer and achieve satisfactory performance.

Individuals can also receive **support services** they need to engage in vocational rehabilitation services, such as transportation assistance and expenses related to getting training, going to school, or looking for a job.

Chapter 3 • Appraisal of External Environment

POTENTIAL CHANGES IN ECONOMY THAT CAN AFFECT CLIENTS' NEEDS

Washington's economy has stabilized over the past year and many expect continuing growth over coming years. The demand for services in times of economic strength has not varied tremendously in the past. However, in a strong economy DVR clients generally achieve successful employment outcomes after a shorter time receiving services. The future impact of the economy on DVR clients depends in part on the type of jobs available and the overall composition of the business opportunities.

TRENDS IN DEMOGRAPHIC AND CUSTOMER CHARACTERISTICS

The needs of Washington citizens with significant health issues and those in poverty continue to grow as funding shrinks. Cuts to partner agencies, especially those serving individuals with mental illness, create extra challenges for DVR. Higher numbers of DVR clients experience mental illness as a primary or secondary disability and DVR has been less successful helping these clients achieve employment outcomes. In addition, DVR has less success with individuals living in poverty and older populations. Both of these segments of the population are growing, making it critical for DVR to partner effectively with other agencies and consider new service delivery options.

ACTIVITIES LINK TO MAJOR PARTNERS

DVR works with a variety of external partners to increase employment opportunities and success for individuals with disabilities. These external partners include businesses, with whom DVR is working to develop strategies that help individuals with disabilities achieve employment outcomes.

DVR partners with programs funded under the Workforce Investment Act and Rehabilitation Act to maximize results for eligible individuals. At the statewide level, DVR establishes written agreements outlining how programs will coordinate and share resources. At the local level, DVR shares case management responsibilities, and coordinates funding and service provision with individuals who are eligible with DVR and with Department of Services for the Blind and/or American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation programs. DVR partners with WorkSource Centers to increase their capacity to serve individuals with disabilities, and refers eligible individuals who can benefit from those programs to use the resources and services available at no cost.

DVR contracts with seven Centers for Independent Living to provide services outlined under Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act. DVR receives funds from the U.S. Department of Education to provide independent living services to individuals with disabilities and/or to increase capacity in underserved areas or to underserved groups.

DVR partners with the State Rehabilitation Council, State Independent Living Council and Client Assistance Program in planning and policy development around vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs and services.

DVR coordinates with two and four year public colleges to ensure appropriate use of public funds in supporting eligible individuals who are also college students. DVR also coordinates with colleges if an eligible individual requires reasonable accommodations in the school setting.

DVR partners with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to coordinate services for high school students with disabilities as they transition out of school and into adult services, higher education and work. At the local level, a DVR counselor serves as a liaison to every high school in the state to help plan and deliver services to eligible students.

Within the Department of Social and Health Services, DVR partners with the Division of Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Division to plan for a system of coordinated service delivery. Individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health illness make up a substantial portion of DVR's caseload. Joint planning is necessary to ensure program coordination and effectiveness and to develop strategies to maximize resources and build capacity. In addition to DSHS partners, DVR also works with Development Disability and Mental Health representatives at the regional, county and community provider level.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

More than 200 individuals attended ten statewide meetings to obtain input on the strategic plan. Attendees included DVR staff, service providers, Rehabilitation Council members, county program representatives, Client Assistance Program staff, and other stakeholders. In addition, DVR leadership met with VR Supervisors, program managers, and headquarters staff in person and distributed a draft strategic plan to all DVR employees for input.

The State Rehabilitation Council holds quarterly forums at which individuals receiving services from DVR are invited to share comments, feedback and concerns regarding DVR services. The Council also conducted a focus group of mental health consumers to learn their experiences and needs related to vocational rehabilitation services. In addition to participating in statewide meetings, the Council formally submitted recommendations to DVR for inclusion in the DVR Strategic Plan.

FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Reauthorization and funding at the federal level continue to present challenges for state VR programs. While the President's 2007 budget proposes a 4.3% increase in funding, this increase is based on elimination of several smaller programs authorized under the Rehabilitation Act, with an assumption that states will continue to provide these services under the Vocational Rehabilitation grant. Considering the elimination of these programs, the President's budget is approximately \$25 million less than the consolidated funding for these programs today. Despite the overall reduction in funding, proposed changes by the House and Senate in reauthorizing the Rehabilitation Act would expand VR requirements for services to youth with disabilities preparing to leave high school and enter adult services, higher education and work. Increased responsibilities to serve youth and less funding to serve them could mean that adults with disabilities, who need and require VR services to support themselves and their families, will face even greater challenges in getting these services.

Individuals with significant disabilities receiving Social Security benefits continue to experience disincentives to employment that impact DVR outcomes. Decreased outcomes also negatively impact revenues for the Division. DVR has trained additional staff and expanded benefits planning throughout the rehabilitation process. In addition to benefits planning, DVR will continue to increase counselor skills in securing the necessary resources to support successful employment for social security beneficiaries.

The cost of contracted services purchased from community rehabilitation programs on behalf of DVR clients is impairing DVR's ability to achieve higher numbers of successful rehabilitations. DVR has redefined contract services and is in the process of procuring new contracts that set fair, reasonable fees. In addition, DVR must evaluate the effectiveness of purchased services and share this information with counselors and clients to make sound decisions in purchasing services. DVR is also looking into purchasing methods through Smart Buy that will achieve cost savings. DVR will also be increasing expertise among its own staff to provide more services directly to reduce costs.

To improve its ability to successfully place individuals in employment, DVR needs to improve its relationship and connection to businesses and employers. DVR needs to partner more effectively with Worksource Centers, clarify the role of its business relations specialist, and support supervisors and counselors in local offices to connect with employers in their communities.

Chapter 4 • Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

E: INCREASE EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY (DSHS Goal)

(Priority of Government: Improve the economic vitality of business and individuals)

Goal 1: Individuals with disabilities achieve gainful employment.
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Objective 1: Deliver high quality vocational rehabilitation services

Strategies:

- Provide new mix of services to help clients develop their employment plan, i.e. benefits planning, information and referral, assessment and career exploration.
- Adopt counseling and guidance practices that are proven effective.
- Target outreach to those who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.
- Develop new communication processes to stay in contact with clients.

Performance Measures:

- *Increase in number of individuals achieving employment outcomes.*
- *Difference between the percent of individuals achieving employment outcomes reporting their own income as their primary source of support at application and the percent reporting so at closure of services.*
- *Completed guide and process for client communication.*

Objective 2: Continually improve services based on feedback from the disability community

Strategies:

- Collect feedback from individuals receiving services throughout the rehabilitation process.
- Partner with the State Rehabilitation Council, State Independent Living Council, Client Assistance Program and others in the disability community to learn and respond to identified needs and issues.

Performance Measures:

- *DVR Client survey results.*
- *DSHS Client survey results.*
- *New process developed to learn from active clients.*

Goal 2: Staff resources and skills support clients achieving their goals.
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Objective 1: Help employees achieve high performance

Strategies:

- Directly deliver key aspects of the rehabilitation process, including assessments, job development, and job placement.
- Develop counselor skills in serving individuals with the most significant barriers to employment.
- Implement quality assurance methods for case services.
- Challenge and motivate staff to meet and exceed expectations.

Performance Measures:

- *Number of employees receiving training in rehabilitation law and practice.*
- *Number of employees receiving training on complex disabilities.*
- *Percentage of job placements completed by DVR employees.*
- *Compliance results for review of case service records.*
- *Percentage of counselors who meet targeted outcomes.*
- *Model developed for team approach to serve challenging cases.*

Objective 2: Recruit and retain qualified staff

Strategies:

- Recruit individuals with knowledge, skills, and abilities that fill an unmet DVR need, including individuals with disabilities.
- Support mentoring to improve employee knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Recognize employee accomplishments.

Performance Measures:

- *Percentage of employees who are individuals with disabilities.*
- *Results from Employee Survey.*
- *Number of employees formally acknowledged for performance and outcomes.*

Objective 3: Obtain high quality, cost effective services from external DVR service providers for clients

Strategies:

- Implement contracts with service providers that allow counselors to deliver more flexible, outcome-based, and cost effective services.
- Build positive, healthy business partnerships with community rehabilitation programs.
- Share information with counselors and clients regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of service providers.
- Utilize WorkSource Centers for VR clients on the waiting list.

Performance Measures:

- *Evaluations of service provider outcomes completed and shared.*

Objective 4: Develop policies, programs and infrastructure that support equitable and effective case services

Strategies:

- Develop methods to promote statewide consistency of eligibility and severity of disability determinations.
- Adopt methods, rules, and policies that create equitable access to services for individuals with all types of disabilities.
- Develop case service guidelines and procedures that reflect effective rehabilitation practices and methodology.

- Implement cost saving purchasing procedures.
- Improve DVR technology to support the efficient, effective documentation and delivery of case services.

Performance Measures:

- *Published information on effective service delivery practices.*
- *Additions and updates to customer services manual.*
- *Completion of automated tools to support processes.*

<p>Goal 3: Community partnerships maximize resources to serve more people.</p>

Objective 1: Partner with businesses and employers to meet the needs of DVR customers now and in the future

Strategies:

- Develop and share vision of positive and cooperative DVR-employer relations.
- Develop and offer industry expertise to the employer community.
- Strengthen relationships with employers, businesses, and economic development councils.

Performance Measures:

- *Model for business relations.*
- *Plan for using resources available through one-stop partners and Employment Security Department (e.g. labor market trends).*
- *Survey of business partners.*

Objective 2: Partner with other adult service providers to coordinate services and maximize resources

Strategies:

- Coordinate services with developmental disabilities programs.
- Partner with tribal programs to improve the relevance of services and positive employment outcomes for American Indians.
- Strengthen partnership with the workforce development system to connect with employers and improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
- Advocate and work within the mental health system to make services available that support individuals to get and keep jobs.
- Partner with high schools to advance effective transition services.
- Establish agreement(s) with public higher education institutions regarding the coordination of resources for DVR clients who are students in higher education.
- Build relationships with Centers for Independent Living that promote the provision of employment services and supports.

Performance Measures:

- *Service agreement with Division of Developmental Disabilities.*
- *Service agreement with Mental Health Division.*
- *Memorandum of agreement with tribal programs.*
- *Number of agreements signed with schools districts.*
- *Number of agreements signed with higher education institutions.*
- *Intranet site with comparable services and benefits.*

----- Diversity Strategies -----

I: VALUE AND DEVELOP EMPLOYEES (DSHS Goal)

(Priority of Government: Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively)

Objective 1: Improve completion rate of mandatory trainings, including Diversity Training

Strategies:

- Complete process to identify mandatory trainings needed for each employee.
- Make sure new employees complete diversity training within first six months of employment for new employees.

Performance Measures:

- *Percentage of employees who completed diversity training.*
- *Average percentage of mandatory trainings completed for all employees.*

Objective 2: Improve the workforce profile of under-represented groups

Strategies:

- Recruit employees that better reflect the diversity of the community of clients in local areas.
- Seek applications from individuals with disabilities.

Performance Measures:

- *Percent of employees who are Hispanic or have American Indian, African American, or Asian American ethnic backgrounds.*
- *Percent of employees who are individuals with disabilities.*

J: IMPROVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS (DSHS Goal)

(Priority of Government: Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively)

Objective 1: Improve disproportionality rates in at least one client service

Strategies:

- Develop partnerships with each American Indian VR program in Washington to improve variety of services available for American Indians.
- Jointly serve eligible American Indians with disabilities.
- Provide counselors in American Indian and state vocational rehabilitation programs with the resources needed to effectively work together.

Performance Measures:

- *Number of joint cases between DVR and American Indian VR programs.*

Chapter 5 • Performance Assessment

GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

The GMAP process provides focus on performance and outcomes critical to DVR's success. While the federal reporting requirements include elements used in the GMAP reporting, the actual GMAP reports contribute to both internal and external communication. The report and process highlights immediate and long-term performance issues, thereby increasing management's accountability to address concerns.

OTHER PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration

The United States Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, conducts an annual review and periodic on-site monitoring of DVR. The annual review is comprised of:

- Service record review to assess DVR's performance in serving individuals with disabilities in compliance with rules and regulations;
- Evaluation of performance statistics in key program standards and indicators; and
- Evaluation of selected areas of focus.

Based on the results of the review, RSA provides technical assistance, requires corrective action and/or makes recommendations for improvement. RSA then follows up throughout the year to monitor DVR's progress on areas identified as needing improvement.

State Auditor

The State Auditor conducts an annual audit of DVR financial records and program operations for compliance with federal and state rules and regulations. The Auditor issues findings to which DVR must respond with a corrective action plan.

DSHS Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Department of Social and Health Services conducts a client satisfaction survey that includes clients across all departmental programs, including DVR. These results are helpful in augmenting DVR client satisfaction survey in two ways – first, they ask additional questions that DVR's survey does not ask, and second, they provide substantiation for results we are receiving in our internal survey on those questions that are similar.

State Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Council, authorized under the Rehabilitation Act, collects client satisfaction information, conducts focus groups and client forums in person to listen to and gather input from individuals who receive DVR services. With this information, the Council develops and recommends program improvements.

Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program, authorized under the Rehabilitation Act, provides information, advice and advocacy to individuals receiving services from DVR to protect their rights. The Client Assistance program, through its contact and assistance to individuals, formulates suggestions and recommendations for program improvements to DVR.

CLOSING PERFORMANCE GAPS

A federal compliance review issued in late 2005 detailed numerous deficiencies in the division's documentation of its rehabilitation practices. To respond, DVR has conducted training with supervisory staff and has designed an automated service record review tool that supervisors will use to monitor ongoing quality of case work. Additional training is planned for all counseling staff that addresses case practices needing improvement. DVR will be reevaluating the rehabilitation policies, processes and practices it uses to determine whether other proven practices may be more effective in achieving rehabilitation outcomes. There are also opportunities for DVR to update technologies for counselors to more easily document decisions and actions.

DVR's federally mandated waiting list requires DVR serve those with the most significant disabilities as a priority. As a result, DVR implemented an assessment tool to determine an individual's severity of disability. Use of this tool resulted in a decrease in representation among some disability groups and increases in others. DVR recently revised the assessment tool and believes it will result in accurate assessments and fair, equitable access to services for all disability groups.

The proportion of individuals with mental health illness represented on DVR caseloads continues to rise, while the supports and resources needed by individuals to be successful in employment after DVR services end have declined. DVR has initiated communication with the Mental Health Division to see how our programs can work together to make employment a higher priority and build capacity in the mental health system. In addition, DVR is partnering with the Mental Health Division to help them assume financial support for the Mental Health Clubhouses. DVR's Director is a member of the Mental Health Transformation statewide group working to build a recovery-based system of mental health services, including employment as an important component of the system.

Coordination of services between DVR and the DSHS Division of Developmental Disabilities is also critical, since individuals who require long term supported employment need to move between the two service systems. DVR has initiated efforts with the Developmental Disabilities Division to pilot a service delivery model that would maximize resources of both programs and assist more individuals with developmental disabilities go to work.

Due to the rising cost of contracted services, DVR is continuing to focus on expanding the provision of direct services by VR counseling staff, including vocational assessment, job placement and retention. DVR is developing training for counseling staff to increase skills in these areas, as well as gaining expertise in serving those with challenging barriers to employment.

Chapter 6 • Internal Capacity Assessment

WORKFORCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

DVR's primary workforce need at the present time is to increase the skills and expertise of counseling staff to help DVR clients achieve their goals. DVR counseling staff will receive training to deliver more direct services to DVR clients, especially those with the most challenging barriers to employment. Recruitment efforts will focus on retaining employees with skills in areas of identified need, including expertise in serving individuals with mental health disabilities, developmental disabilities, and other complex and/or multiple disabilities. DVR will also increase efforts to recruit and hire employees with disabilities, including individuals who have received DVR services.

To retain employees, DVR needs to implement employee recognition methods that acknowledge accomplishments, collect information from employees related to workplace issues and satisfaction, and act on that information.

Organizationally, DVR needs to establish a strong emphasis on quality assurance in its programs and services and improve consistency statewide in the application of policies and procedures in the delivery of services. DVR needs to monitor case practices routinely and follow up as indicated by results at the counselor, unit, and statewide level. DVR needs to build capacity for providing a broader array of services directly and establishing effective methods to keep people engaged throughout the rehabilitation process.

To assist a greater number of individuals to achieve employment, DVR needs to improve the health and vitality of its partnership with community rehabilitation programs through improved communication and sharing of information. DVR is implementing new contracts that enable counselors to purchase services from providers that are flexible, outcome based and reasonably priced. Now, DVR needs to evaluate the effectiveness of purchased services and make that information available to counseling staff and clients for sound decision making.

In addition, DVR needs to work with businesses and further develop employer relationships. This will help DVR better serve clients and achieve employment outcomes.

TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY

DVR has been using an automated service tracking and reporting system (STARS) for more than 10 years. Periodic updates are released to add features, to address new requirements, and to increase efficiency. Despite ongoing maintenance and upgrades, staff report difficulty using the primary case management tool -- the customer service module -- to effectively document case services. DVR needs to evaluate options available to address this need, select the most feasible approach, and commit resources to develop and implement a solution.

DVR also needs to design and implement an automated service record review tool for supervisors to record the results of monthly service record reviews. This information needs to be available at the individual, unit and statewide level so that DVR can use the

information to conduct follow up coaching with counselors and to identify and act on trends and issues identified at the unit or statewide level.

In addition, DVR needs to design a data collection system to measure the quality and effectiveness of services provided by service providers. DVR needs to quantify the cost effectiveness of purchased services and use the information in making sound contractual decisions. DVR also needs to provide information to counselors and clients who are considering the use of contracted services to inform those decisions with objective data.

FINANCIAL CAPACITY

DVR does not have adequate funds to serve all eligible individuals and therefore maintains a federally mandated waiting list. Approximately 10,000 individuals apply for services each year while DVR has funds to initiate services to approximately 4,000 to 5,000. As of May 2006, more than 12,000 individuals are waiting for DVR services.

While DVR's basic federal grant increases by 2-3% each year, the cost of providing vocational rehabilitation services increases at a far higher rate. The rising cost of contracted employment services, higher education, rehabilitation technology, and medical/psychological services has caused a dramatic increase in DVR's cost per case over the past three years. As a result, DVR is losing ground each year in terms of the number of people it is able to serve and the number who successfully enter employment.

Additionally, in federal fiscal year 2005, DVR was not able to capture additional federal revenues typically received to enhance the basic grant. Hurricane Katrina diverted excess federal funds normally distributed among state VR programs to Louisiana and other hurricane affected states. Also, reimbursements DVR receives from the Social Security Administration for serving individuals who receive Social Security benefits have steadily declined. While these revenues are outside DVR's basic grant, the funds have been used to augment direct client services and not receiving the funds has impacted the number of people DVR can serve this year.

SERVICE DELIVERY CAPACITY

Nearly half of DVR's case service funds are spent purchasing employment-related services from community rehabilitation programs who are contracted providers. In 2004, DVR moved to a milestone outcome method of contracting which has substantially increased the cost of services but has not increased the number of people successfully achieving employment. DVR has recently renegotiated contracts that will enable counselors to purchase outcome based services that are cost effective.

DVR is serving individuals with more challenging barriers to employment. In many cases, contracted providers do not have the staff expertise or skills to assist individuals with complex needs overcome barriers and become employed.

Individuals with mental health disabilities make up a larger proportion of DVR's caseload than in the past; however, the mental health system has not made employment services and supports a priority. Without comprehensive services and supports available after the DVR case ends, DVR services are frequently not successful.

Individuals with developmental disabilities who require supported employment also make up a large proportion of DVR cases. Long term funding for supported employment cannot be provided by DVR, but must be provided by another agency. Typically, the DSHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) provides the funding for long term support through the counties. As demand for services grows, funding is not available for everyone eligible for this service. When DVR determines that an individual requires supported employment, but DVR cannot determine with a reasonable likelihood that long term support will be available after the DVR case closes, DVR cannot move forward with a plan of services. DVR and DDD are working together to look at creative solutions to this issue.

In order for DVR to significantly reduce or eliminate the waiting list, DVR must place new emphasis on helping new applicants know about other service delivery systems in their local area. This information and referral service can help these individuals, as well as those currently on the waiting list achieve outcomes without DVR. Helping clients find other services can help address the fact that the need for services exceeds DVR's current capacity.



This document is also available electronically at:
www1.dshs.wa.gov/strategic

Persons with disabilities may request a hard copy by contacting DSHS at: 360.902.7800, or TTY: 800.422.7930.

Questions about the strategic planning process may be directed to DSHS Constituent Services at: 1.800.737.0617.

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